

# BUYING DOWN STRATEGIC RISK: INSTITUTIONALIZING SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE

BY

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SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE**

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*Disclaimer*

*The views expressed in the academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The Armed Forces of the United States will continue to organize, train, equip and advise security forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other partner countries for the foreseeable future. This project examines ongoing efforts by the Department of Defense to bring irregular warfare, of which foreign security force assistance is a key component, into strategic balance with conventional (traditional) warfare. The research identifies gaps that exist between the new defense strategy, defense policy, and organizational structure, conventional force employment, and training. Recommendations are provided to address the identified gaps in order for the Armed Forces of the United States to better achieve an appropriate strategic balance, buy down strategic risk, and be more capable of responding to complex issues and operations associated with the current and future global security landscape.

## BUYING DOWN STRATEGIC RISK: INSTITUTIONALIZING SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE

The United States has arguably been engaged in security force assistance operations of some form or fashion since the early 1800's. Never before has the concept of irregular warfare and unconventional thinking received so much open consideration and debate at the top and throughout the defense establishment, except for perhaps a brief period in the early 1960's when President Kennedy championed the Green Berets. The Armed Forces of the United States may finally be at a "tipping point," to elevating irregular warfare to a status equal to conventional military operations.<sup>1</sup>

U.S. Dominance in conventional warfare has given prospective adversaries, particularly non-state actors and their state sponsors, strong motivation to adopt asymmetric methods to counter our advantages. For this reason, we must display a mastery of irregular warfare comparable to that which we possess in conventional warfare.

– 2008 National Defense Strategy, p.4.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates boldly proposed a new national defense strategy in the summer of 2008 that lays a foundation for balancing effort and resources between conventional (traditional) warfare and irregular warfare. Following the 2008 Presidential election and concurrent with his retention as the Secretary of Defense in the new presidential administration, he has recently invigorated his call for balance in the Nation's overall defense strategy. Secretary Gates is issuing clarion calls to emphasize this need for strategic balance. He outlines the nation's new defense strategy and provides an unambiguous signal throughout an essay published in the January/February 2009 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. In this essay titled "*A Balanced Strategy, Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age*" he emphasizes that the

defining principle of the 2008 National Defense Strategy is balance. He wastes no words addressing the importance of unconventional thinking. He puts conventional threats into perspective and identifies the need for institutional change in the defense establishment so that future warriors will not have to learn the same hard lessons over and over again. The Secretary laments that the Pentagon, his own establishment, lacks a dedicated constituency that will embrace change and move forward with institutionalizing the capabilities necessary to conduct the wars we are in-- irregular ones, and quickly meet the needs of the forces in the field at war. The behemoth defense establishment is resistant to change like most hierarchical organizations, even though its leader has been trumpeting the need for change for quite some time now.<sup>2</sup>

The opportunity for institutional change in the defense establishment has not been this great since the end of the Cold War but there are skeptics that feel that change may be too hard to bring about under the current system. Bernard Finel, a senior fellow at the American Security Project, recently expressed this view in an article on developing an affordable security strategy. He states there are two basic problems with the way America develops defense policy. The first is that we do not do a good enough job thinking through what capability the American military needs. The second is the process for developing strategy and building supporting forces is broken.<sup>3</sup> Finel also highlights the notable bureaucratic challenges associated with the process by observing "Simply put, the current process in place to manage the Defense Department is too complex and cumbersome to allow the U.S. to build and train a force to meet America's strategic needs."<sup>4</sup>

The Armed Forces of the United States, and in particular the Army, have a resilient post-9/11 history. The Services have demonstrated over the past eight years at war they can adapt to changing situations and complex environments along a full spectrum of operations. It is also generally accepted that complex operations and irregular warfare will continue to be in the forefront of U.S. military activity for the foreseeable future. This will be true as long as there remains no peer competitor and the threats of armed-group and non-state actor aggression fomented in weak, failing or failed states. It is in this context of a very complex global security landscape that the United States Army must examine new ways to proceed with adapting and organizing its forces to defend the nation, fight and win the nation's wars, and protect strategic interests while balancing strategic risk. Furthermore, the Army must determine how, in preparing for current and future conflict, to best adapt as an institution to meet the nation's current and future security requirements ostensibly elevating irregular warfare to the same level of strategic importance as traditional warfare as Secretary Gates clearly articulates in his calls for strategic balance.

Security force assistance (SFA) is defined in Field Manual 3.07, *Stability Operations*, "as the unified action to generate, employ, and sustain local, host-nation, or regional security forces in support of a legitimate authority."<sup>5</sup> Security force assistance is a new term, first appearing in FM 3.07. It is presumably oriented towards general purpose forces that conduct this action given its application in FM 3.07. Although similar to Foreign Internal Defense (FID), it is not FID. Internal Defense and Development is not FID and it is not SFA. They all, however, do fall under the broader umbrella of security assistance.<sup>6</sup> This survey examines the security force assistance component of irregular

warfare. It identifies current gaps between strategy/policy and capability/capacity and explores potential solutions on how best the Defense Department and Department of the Army might proceed with institutional adaptation in order to bring more balance to the overall national defense strategy and buy down strategic risk. This survey focuses on the U.S. Army. However, security force assistance is inextricably tied to all the military services. Many of the key concepts addressed here may prove useful for the sister services and for other U.S. government agencies as they often have or need corresponding capabilities and are vital parts of a whole of government approach to complex operations.<sup>7</sup>

The framework for this survey derives from a literature review of the 2008 National Defense Strategy, updated Department of Defense Policy, emerging Army doctrine, personal experience and informed defense and national security insights from those who have studied and written about these issues. Peter Noonan recently pointed out that a traditionalist versus transitionalist versus modernist debate is currently raging throughout the defense establishment.<sup>8</sup> The debate amongst them serves as the backdrop for this survey.

The National Defense Strategy and DoD Policy do not identify a lead Service Executive Agent proponent for security force assistance (SFA) operations. According to both strategy and policy, all services are responsible for contributing to SFA operations in irregular warfare. Additionally, the principles of SFA are being institutionalized across the Armed Forces at too slow of a pace. A third gap is that there is only a marginal effort in place to build sufficient SFA capability and capacity to meet the requirements of current and future operations. The fourth gap is the atrophy of high-end combat skills



resulting from continued reliance on combat forces to bear the burden of SFA thereby increasing the level of risk to be able to respond to more traditional national security threats that may be looming on the horizon. Finally, for the scope of this survey, there is a definite training gap between tactical level SFA participants and whole of government participants that must be addressed in order for synergistic effects to be achieved in responding to irregular threats. All of these challenges are interrelated in some form or fashion yet they each require concerted action to fix.

#### Identify a Lead Service Executive Agent for Security Force Assistance

The Department of Defense should add Security Force Assistance (SFA) as a core function for each of the Military Departments and specify the Army as Lead Service and Executive Agent. The 2008 National Defense Strategy (NDS) clearly outlines the importance of elevating irregular warfare to an equal footing with conventional warfare in order for the United States to meet the security demands of the current and future global security landscape. The NDS was published in June 2008 and was followed by a Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 3000.7, titled *Irregular Warfare (IW)*, which was signed into policy on December 1, 2008. During this same period of time, late 2008, the Pentagon conducted a Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review (QRM) in preparation for the next Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and released the *Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report* in January 2009.

The Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report is an important resource for this survey because Irregular Warfare (IW) was identified as a high-interest issue area by DoD leadership and the 2008 House Armed Services Committee (HASC). IW

received extensive attention as one of four Roles and Missions Focus areas.<sup>9</sup> The QRM established an updated roles and missions framework that links DoD's existing planning framework with strategic end states and overall defense and military strategy. Irregular warfare is noted as a DoD Core Mission Area, which now total six, and each has its own Joint Operating Concept that is designed to visualize future operations.<sup>10</sup>

The QRM irregular warfare (IW) high-interest issue review team was led by U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict and Interdependent Capabilities. The team examined irregular warfare roles and missions across Special Operations Forces (SOF) and General Purpose Forces (GPF) as well as across active and reserve components. The IW issue team reached several conclusions. First, was that both SOF and GPF have significant IW responsibilities. DoD is continuing to refine how Services develop and apply capabilities in different environments. Another QRM IW review team conclusion was that "USSOCOM, as the DoD joint proponent for security force assistance, would collaborate with the Joint Staff, Joint Forces Command, the other Services and Combatant Commanders to develop global joint sourcing solutions for security force assistance requirements."<sup>11</sup> The first gap emerges here as the security force assistance mission appears to be subordinated under IW to the USSOCOM as the DoD joint proponent who has acknowledged there is a significant GPF contribution to IW. No Lead Service proponent has been identified; no rose has been pinned for Executive Agent responsibility.

The team also concluded that General Purpose Forces (GPF): will continue to support and play a leading role in stability operations and counterinsurgency; will play a

greater role in foreign internal defense for steady state operations; will have an increased role in training, advising and equipping foreign security forces. GPF will deploy and engage with foreign partner security forces, support civil-military teams in stability operations; and will have an increased role in conducting integrated irregular warfare operations with SOF.<sup>12</sup>

In order for GPF to do all of this effectively the team concluded, GPF will require a greater degree of language and cultural instruction to train and advise indigenous forces. The qualifying disclaimer the review issued was that the SOF and GPF force mix for conducting future security force operations will largely depend upon the risk and character of the operational environment, not simply by the task at hand. Finally, but no less important, the issue review team concluded that “persistent presence and sustainment of irregular warfare activities requires increasing specific capabilities across the Total Force, including civil affairs and psychological operations in the Active Component Force.”<sup>13</sup>

USSOCOM cannot and should not bear the entire burden of SFA proponentcy as it has a host of special operations missions to perform and finite capacity. In this context, security force assistance (which is also placed under Military Support to Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction Operations (SSTR), a completely different DoD Core Mission Area) should no longer be considered “special”. Requirements to have the training, structure, processes and doctrine necessary to train, equip, and advise large numbers of foreign forces first appears as policy in Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 3000.5, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations*, dated November 28, 2005. DoDD 3000.5

makes SSTR the responsibility of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in coordination with the Secretaries of the Military Departments.<sup>14</sup>

More recently, DoD Directive 3000.7, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*, dated December 1, 2008 also specifically addresses training, advising and assisting foreign security forces as a responsibility of all services. It is DoD policy to maintain capabilities and capacity so that the DoD is as effective in IW as it is in traditional warfare in order to ensure that, when directed, the Department can: train, advise, and assist foreign security forces. This also applies to partners at the ministerial, service, and tactical levels to ensure security in their sovereign territory or to contribute forces to operations elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

DoD needs to extract security force assistance from IW and conventional warfare and address the holistic requirement for the capability through a full spectrum lens. SFA needs to be viewed separately from traditional SOF FID due to the breadth and magnitude of the SFA mission. DoD should lift SFA off the shoulders of USSOCOM and put it in the lap of the Army. The Army, as the preponderant ground force Service should develop the capability and capacity to manage the requirement. Reality on the ground reflects this need for change. It is already happening to a degree out of necessity, albeit on the margins. Observations from the field conclude that conventional forces have taken over the advising effort, traditionally a task for Special Forces and other government agencies, due to the extremely high operational tempo of these more specialized forces.<sup>16</sup>

Foreign Internal Defense (FID) has long been the purview of Special Forces and it should continue to be. Special Forces must also retain the responsibility organize, train, equip, and advise host-nation Special Operating Forces as a sub-set of a larger

security force assistance effort as is the case in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, SFA on the magnitude of what is being required in Afghanistan and Iraq is beyond the scope of traditional FID. SFA must become a core capability of the Armed Forces with the Army designated as the Lead Service and Executive Agent. "... the Army's SOF community does not wish to "own" the Army's conventional advising effort, but it wishes to have a role. The general purpose Army needs to accept the eventuality that Army special operations forces will not be available for the conventional advisory role."<sup>17</sup>

The Army appears to be content for the moment with maintaining the status quo. The status quo being the pursuit of a "full-spectrum" balance in its forces, the modular centerpiece of which is the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) of multiple varieties. The Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA), General George Casey, recently gave the following response to a question of whether the Army will continue to expand the program of investing in the development of advisors to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan: "Now, there are some folks who say we need an advisor corps. I'd say we have an advisor corps; it's called Special Forces. The question is how large of an effort do we need for training foreign armies."<sup>18</sup>

The status quo will not support a requirement that is likely to exceed the capacity of the SOF for the foreseeable future. According to the Secretary of Defense, "Our strategy emphasizes building the capacities of a broad spectrum of partners as the basis for long-term security."<sup>19</sup> Additionally he states, "We will support, train, advise and equip partner security forces to counter insurgencies, terrorism, proliferation, and other threats."<sup>20</sup> In the previously mentioned interview, GEN Casey also recalled meeting with the Joint Forces Command Commander, the USMC Commandant, and the

USSOCOM Commander to discuss what is needed for an effort to train foreign armies.

GEN Casey states: “First, we all thought we needed to set ourselves up in Iraq and Afghanistan for the long haul because we’re going to be training the militaries and the police forces in Iraq and Afghanistan for a while. Then we thought that we could probably do the rest with Special Forces, and we’re growing a battalion each year over the next five years.”<sup>21</sup> The status quo plus the increase in Special Forces by five battalions appears to be the extent of the Army’s adaption to the new strategic environment. This adaptation relies entirely on Special Forces and draws heavily on full-spectrum conventional BCTs. It does not include any additional capability or capacity to generate GPF advisors outside of a current ad hoc under-resourced brigade arrangement. The CSA appears to confirm this in the interview: “So we are looking more toward the majority of this work being done by Special Forces, augmented, when they need to be by regionally oriented conventional forces, which is something the ARFORGEN model allows us to do.”<sup>22</sup>

#### Continue initiatives to institutionalize SFA across the Total Force

Despite the lack of a specified Service proponent, institutionalization of SFA operations is crawling along. The Army must continue to institutionalize all aspects of SFA across the entire force in order to prepare units, Soldiers and leaders for these types of operations. DoD policy dictates institutionalization of IW. It is DoD policy to: “Explicitly integrate concepts and capabilities relevant to IW across all DoD activities including doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTMLPF); policy; analysis; exercises; experiments; and applicable

strategies and plans.”<sup>23</sup> The CSA acknowledges both the importance and difficulty of conducting SFA. He states “And over time, we’ve come to realize that the key to long-term success is indigenous forces. It’s artful; it takes more art to train somebody else to do missions than to do them yourself, but I think we’re getting more and more sophisticated in our abilities.”<sup>24</sup> Experience from the field suggests that there is a clear need to institutionalize this critical capability in the modern full-spectrum Army. There are still gaps to fill. Except for FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, and a brief mention in the most recent FM 3-0, *Full-Spectrum Operations*, Army doctrine fails to address the use of GPFs as advisors.<sup>25</sup>

DoD has an organization, the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance (JCISFA) that consists of roughly 25 people and includes representatives from each Service. They work for the Commanding General, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center (CAC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas who is dual-hatted as the Director of JCISFA. JCISFA has produced three useful handbooks on security force assistance operations, the *Security Force Assistance Planners’ Guide*, the *Transition Team (TT) Handbook*, and the *Commander’s Handbook for Security Force Assistance*.<sup>26</sup> These products are not doctrine, but rather best practices and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) captured by the JCISFA team from every possible lessons learned source. These products are invaluable to units who are preparing for or executing an SFA mission. The products assist units in adjusting their mindset from major combat operations to an advisor-oriented SFA mission.

The handbooks highlight the challenges associated with unit partnering, training, advising and assisting foreign security forces. These products were primarily written to

assist units in preparing for a mission they have not been trained to perform because the doctrine does not exist to guide GPF employment in security force assistance operations. The Army identified the doctrine gap and doctrine developers are writing a security force assistance operations manual at CAC.<sup>27</sup>

FM 3.07.1, *Security Force Assistance*, is being written and as of February 12, 2009 is in a final draft format. The Field Manual will receive further review and undoubtedly undergo additional changes before approval for publishing. Since it is not an approved Field Manual, this survey will not specifically reference nor draw any citations from the draft version reviewed for this research. It is worthy to note, however, that upon initial review, it appears to be the best collection of principles on advising security forces that the Army has produced to date.

Dr. John Nagl, a recognized expert on counterinsurgency operations and noted proponent of an increased GPF advisor effort highlights that Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, recognizes the importance of the advisory mission to success in counterinsurgency campaigns. The manual clearly states that FID is now a “big Army” responsibility. Nagl also emphasizes that the scope and scale of current and future training programs today has grown exponentially. “While FID has been traditionally the primary responsibility of the special operating forces (SOF), training foreign forces is now a core competency of regular and reserve units of all services.”<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the most visible sign of ongoing institutionalization, other than doctrine development, is recent changes in personnel policy in the Army. In 2008, the Chief of Staff of the Army announced that Majors who lead transition teams will receive key and developmental credit for serving in those critical positions. Lieutenant colonels and



colonels who lead transition teams will now be centrally selected similar to the way commanders are selected for command billets and they will be given credit recognizing the importance and difficulty of performing that mission. This is a small step in a positive direction; however, the jury is still out on exactly what this means in terms of career progression and selection for promotion and future assignments. The Army might also take a lesson from the other ground force in DoD. The Marine Corps has recently begun their adaptation to irregular warfare by commissioning two new organizations that indicate their understanding of the need to adapt to a complex global security landscape.

#### Create SFA capability and capacity

The Army should commission and fully resource an enduring Security Force Assistance Command that organizes, trains, equips and administers a scalable quantity of GPF advisors. The USMC established a newly task organized Security Cooperation Marine Air Ground Task Force (SC MAGTF) to address partner building capacities the Marines Corps expects to be called upon to provide in the foreseeable future. Similar to a Marine Expeditionary Unit, but task organized for security cooperation and civil-military operations, the SC MAGTF will have capabilities, mobility, and sustainability commensurate with its requirements to provide training to less developed military forces.<sup>29</sup> The United States Marine Corps (USMC) also commissioned a Marine Corps Training and Advisor Group (MCTAG) in October 2007 in an effort to optimize its forces.

General Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, describes the advisor group's purpose as one "to source the Marine Corps' advisory capability to support

mission requirements that exceed those of the SC MAGTFs. An embryonic capability now, it will grow to constitute a cadre of trained advisors organized into regional branches that deploy scalable teams of Marine Advisors to partner nations.”<sup>30</sup> The Army might find value in examining the Marine Corps model of adaptation. Nagl says as much by asserting “The U.S. military’s role in irregular warfare cannot be wished away, and the Army has a responsibility to prepare itself to fulfill that role as effectively as possible.”<sup>31</sup> Nagl also suggests that the need for Army advisors “will only increase over time relative to the number of conventional units we deploy, outstripping the capacity of the Special Forces and straining current improvisational measures.”<sup>32</sup>

The debate as to whether a permanent Army advisor corps is necessary is continuing. Nagl reasons that with ongoing requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as many places around the globe, “the Army should create a permanent standing advisory command with responsibility for all aspects of the advisor mission—from doctrine through facilities.”<sup>33</sup> Institutional resistance is strong. Major Michael Jason, another advisor corps proponent and Transition Team veteran, laments about how the institution is resistant to change and suggests that any action to move towards establishing a permanent advisor corps in the Army faces stiff bureaucratic resistance.<sup>34</sup> Nagl also feels that near-term change in this regard will be difficult. He offers a way ahead by suggesting that internal constituencies within the Army be strengthened for irregular warfare.<sup>35</sup>

What kind of permanent advisor corps does the Army need? Three different proposals emerge from recent literature: one large stand alone advisor command proposed by Dr. Nagl; a smaller and more task organized “full-spectrum” command

proposed by MAJ Michael Jason; and a scalable cadre-type organization, an “Advisor Vanguard”, proposed by MAJ Raymond Mattox.

Nagl supports the creation of a large advisor command; “any advisor command should have responsibility over 20,000 soldiers.”<sup>36</sup> This command would be led by a Lieutenant General and be the proponent for all aspects of the advisor mission: doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leader development, personnel and facilities. It would oversee the training and deployment of 25-Soldier advisory teams organized into three 200-team advisor divisions, commanded by major generals who would deploy with the teams on their yearlong advisory tours. He asserts that this chain of command would simplify the command relationships with conventional forces that have “limited the effectiveness of advisory teams now serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.”<sup>37</sup>

MAJ Jason’s proposed 5,000-man advisor command would also be led by a three-star general and would control all advising, equipping and training of foreign forces. The command would include an advisor school. It would consist of three rapid deployable 240-man teams each capable of task organizing to advise a division. Additionally, each of the Army’s 48 BCTs would receive five 10-man advisor teams that have the advisor mission as their only responsibility and would not fill other BCT positions. The BCT teams would receive language and advisor specific training between deployment periods and be used to train the BCT conventional force on the security force assistance mission.<sup>38</sup>

Major Raymond Mattox proposes a professional combat advisor corps of unspecified size that would serve as a professional cadre of advisors that expands and contracts based upon operational requirements. Central to his proposal is that the Army

would maintain a select corps of highly educated advisor leadership, leveraging new civil-schooling opportunities offered to mid-grade officers in the Army. He argues that the cadre sustains institutional knowledge and provides the framework for rapid expansion of an advisor corps if necessary. Mattox asserts that regardless of whether the Army establishes a very large combat advisor corps or smaller contingents, the requirement to have an educated advisor cadre is the same.<sup>39</sup>

Each of these proposed solutions to creating an enduring GPF Army advisor capability to meet capacity requirements deserves consideration. In an period of endless conflict and finite resources, the Army's selection of capabilities to respond to complex operations and irregular warfare within the changing global security landscape must be carefully measured. With recent approved increases in troop strength, the Army could absorb any one of these proposals without an inordinate amount of additional resources being required. However, traditionalists and transistionalists would argue that change to the status quo would come at the opportunity cost of building several programmed BCTs.

Opponents to creating a new expanded advisor capability at the expense of increasing traditional and full spectrum capability point out that there is no compelling evidence that suggests this works. "There is little evidence to support the conclusion that armies that structure forces specifically to do counterinsurgency or humanitarian support produce better efforts. For that matter, there is not much evidence of armies actually having structured exclusively for those kinds of missions."<sup>40</sup>

Reflecting back on the Marine Corps' logic of creating these new irregular warfare capabilities in order to optimize their combat forces, an advisor command might

be the capability the Army needs to ensure its sum outweighs all of its parts. Consider Nagl's recent analysis of the current ad hoc advisory efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both efforts are under-resourced and have been since the creation of their missions. In a recent *Joint Forces Quarterly* article, Nagl cites from a GAO report that the Afghanistan embedded trainer mission has been filled to only 46 percent of the requirement for Afghan National Army trainers and an even worse 32 percent requirement for Afghan National Police trainers.<sup>41</sup> It is impossible to achieve success in irregular warfare with that low of a commitment. There are many good reasons why those requirements have not been fully met, notably the other war and strain on limited resources (troops), and the lack of a mechanism to adequately build advisor capacity. If for no other reason, this current lack of capability and capacity bodes for adaptation. The United States has publicly committed to providing a strategic enduring advisor commitment to Iraq and Afghanistan. What will it take for the Army to build an enduring security force assistance capability and capacity?

The creation of an advisor command is going to take one or more influential general officer or flag rank advocates who have either personally conducted the advisor mission, that is, commanded one of the security transition commands or who have benefitted from a mission-critical, mutually-inclusive relationship with embedded advisor transition teams. Institutionalization of SFA is slowly occurring due in large part to operational necessity despite cultural inertia. It needs to continue to develop, but it will take a dedicated general officer or two to push long-term institutionalization of SFA in the Army beyond the tipping point.

### Maintain Full Spectrum Dominance

The Army must continue to develop capable ground forces and future combat systems that can operate anywhere, maintain dominance along the full spectrum of operations, and retain the high-end competitive advantage. The argument for institutionalizing security force assistance is not an “either/or” proposition, it is an “and” proposition. The Army needs to continue to plan on how best to maintain full-spectrum dominance and better address how to meet SFA requirements. Some opponents of creating a security force assistance capability argue that general purpose forces can handle the requirement within the scope of their full-spectrum capability. The logical question then, is why haven’t they been able to handle it? Why do we have an ad hoc advisor mill cranking out advisors at too slow of a pace to meet requirements in two theaters? How much is too much to expect of a BCT? Consider Bernard Finel’s recent analysis in *Armed Forces Journal*. Finel states that the capability and capacity gaps are clear: “We need more ground forces, and those forces need to receive different and better training and equipment. The Army in particular has to acknowledge that an all-purpose force is one that is not optimized for any specific role, and given the tremendous difficulty associated with nation-building activities, a specialized element is necessary.”<sup>42</sup>

Some traditionalist thinkers suggest, as in the case of Gian Gentile’s recent article in *Joint Force Quarterly* that “Nationbuilding, rather than fighting, has become the core function of the U.S. Army.”<sup>43</sup> Outspoken in his opposition to the softening of the Army by the ongoing institutional shift towards irregular warfare, Gentile states “The real question, in view of America’s ongoing military experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, is

whether the Army should be prepared to conduct stability operations, nationbuilding, counterinsurgency, and related operations for more than very brief periods.”<sup>44</sup> Gentile makes a great point. The Army’s capability to train, advise and assist foreign security forces should not come at the expense of the BCTs; there is too much risk associated with marginalizing the traditional warfare and counterinsurgency missions. There is also risk in marginalizing the SFA mission, just look at Afghanistan. BCTs are not the best tool for conducting bottom to top building of foreign armies. They are an effective tool at bringing collective training and operations up to a higher level of proficiency through partnering, higher than an advisor team can achieve alone. The evidence is there in Iraq and Afghanistan. Not everyone agrees with this assertion.

The CSA’s remarks about a recent visit to Afghanistan amplifies this disconnect. “I just came back from Afghanistan, and more and more I’m hearing Soldiers on the ground say that the partnerships—matching an Afghani battalion up with a coalition battalion or coalition company—is having a greater impact on the indigenous forces than transition teams. We may not need as many transition teams, just aligning them with the coalition forces may be a better way.”<sup>45</sup> There are several problems with the Chief’s generalization in this case. The first, is that U.S. combat forces are only present in three of five major geographic regions in Afghanistan, and coalition forces in other parts of the country are not capable of partnering. However, U.S. (and NATO) advisors, embedded transition teams (ETTs) and Operational Mentor Liaison Teams (OMLTs), are located with Afghan National Security Forces in every province. Less than three-fifths of the Afghan Army has contact with suitable U.S. or coalition forces in order to effectively partner. In most of the successful partnerships the ETT or OMLT facilitates

the partnership as a progression in their Afghan unit's quest to be able to operate independently. The second major problem with the Chief's suggestion is that the coalition forces doing the partnering did not raise the Afghan unit from the ground up. BCTs would have tremendous difficulty raising a unit from square one, especially if they were also fighting an insurgency or hunting down terrorists. Finally, the coalition units have a determined enemy to hunt down and kill. They have a pressing mission. A diffused focus on partnering with host-nation forces at the wrong time, or worse, only at the time of their choosing violates all the advisor-partner relationship principles critical to successful security force assistance operations.<sup>46</sup>

The available JCISFA security force assistance TTP is heavily oriented towards informing or teaching conventional units, defined for this survey's purpose as Brigade Combat Teams or BCTs, on how to be good advisors and how to partner with foreign security forces. Performing the security force assistance mission is within the realm of capability for a BCT, however, it comes at too high of a cost in regards to throwing the traditional warfare mission capability out of balance. This is perhaps the most concerning gap because the Army, and the other services for that matter, need to have the additional capacity to field a professional advisor effort in order to execute the best practices, TTP and emerging doctrine.

Available literature on how to advise foreign security forces reveals that characteristics and requirements to be proficient advisors are extensive. The skills, experience, time and individual commitment required to establish and foster a successful advisor to partner relationship is beyond the capability of a BCT to accomplish if the BCT is also engaged in counterinsurgency operations and arguably



impossible if the BCT is engaged in major combat operations or traditional warfare. The extensive assortment of mission essential tasks required to conduct SFA suggests that a permanent and professionally trained advisor organization is best.

Atrophied fighting skills are a major concern. There have been reports written about senior leaders worrying about major combat operations skills atrophying over the past eight years as counterinsurgency operations became the focus for all units.<sup>47</sup> There is truth to that concern. Units observed training at the National Training Center from 2005 to 2007 in preparation for their deployment to Iraq were focused, and rightfully so, almost singularly on COIN operations. This included developing the ability to go back and forth from non-kinetic to kinetic operations and back again quickly. This was not, however, a satisfactory exercise in high-end combined arms operations of the previous decade. This firsthand assessment is not an indictment against BCTs but rather the sobering truth that preparing for repetitive combat deployment with limited combat forces for a long period of time results in a noticeable atrophy of high-end combat skills.<sup>48</sup> Strapping the SFA mission on the backs of the BCTs as a long-term solution is not a good idea. Can they do it if properly trained? Yes, they can.

Proponents of a permanent advisor capability like Nagl recognize that “after the vast majority of conventional U.S. BCTs have gone home, the majority of the American commitment to those wars will be embedded advisory teams.”<sup>49</sup> And traditionalist Gentile agrees that the BCTs need to get back to focusing on fighting as he asserts that the Army is “out of balance and at some point needs to get back into shape to conduct operations at the higher end of the conflict spectrum.”<sup>50</sup>

## Training

DoD, with the Army as the lead Service, should create, resource and operate a joint, interagency, external agency and multi-national training center modeled after the highly successful Combat Training Centers (CTCs). The National Defense Strategy calls for DoD “to develop the military capability and capacity to hedge against uncertainty, and the institutional agility and flexibility to plan early and respond effectively alongside interdepartmental, non-governmental and international partners.”<sup>51</sup>

A very effective way to pull all the intricate pieces together early and prepare for an operation is to exercise all of the components together. There will have to be a great deal of cooperation amongst government agencies in order to make this a reality. Agencies are continuing to build internal capacity to meet the challenges of the global security landscape. Michele Flournoy and Shawn Brimley pointed out last fall in a *Washington Quarterly* article: “Two particular problems have plagued interagency operations from the first post-Cold War intervention in Somalia to present-day operations in Iraq: the absence of sufficient operational capacity in the civilian agencies of the U.S. government and the lack of process and mechanisms to effectively integrate the actions of multiple agencies to achieve unity of effort across the U.S. government.”<sup>52</sup>

Creating a joint interagency training center where units, advisor transition teams, sister Services, interagency and multi-national partners train would be extremely beneficial. Learning how to mass capabilities that each Service or agency brings to the problem set in order to create synergistic effects and positive outcomes would be the best mechanism for filling in the operational gaps that exist in the whole of government approach to irregular warfare. Units, advisor teams, and all agency participants would

benefit immeasurably from a training experience of this magnitude and scope prior to deployment; if it could be created and resourced properly. The CTCs are great models for this type of training methodology and should be replicated as a whole of government operating concept is developed. The next level of sophistication would be to conduct an exercise where BCT participants, advisor transition team participants, host-nation role players, non-governmental organization representatives, interagency representatives, and multi-national contributors all trained together in preparation for a well-planned pre-conflict engagement or post-conflict response to a situation of strategic importance.

Formal advisor training is also a requirement. Specific SFA advisor training needs to be further developed using the available and emerging doctrine, best practices and TTPs. Some suggest that a training center and school organization is best suited to meet the numerous training needs associated with advisors.<sup>53</sup> As General Casey noted, advising security forces is an art and it must be trained. One of the most common errors that American Soldiers and untrained advisors make is that they expect host-nation forces to meet American Army standards. In fact, advisors should be encouraging host-nation forces to meet standards that conform to the host-nation's military culture and standards. It takes training to become proficient in that ability because human nature takes a Soldier back to what he or she is most comfortable with when assessing, and advisors have to break that tendency.

David Jesmer, a retired Special Forces Colonel who has extensive experience with training foreign militaries illustrates this tendency in a recent article in *Armed Forces Journal* where he states: "U.S. military advisers and analysts too often view Iraqi tactics, techniques, and procedures through their culturally biased perceptual lenses

and, although completely understandable, this skews the analysis.” Jesmer explains: “There is no need to develop a NATO-style Iraqi military—we shouldn’t always measure Iraqi progress by American standards. Rather, we should look at comparable militaries in the region and attempt to judge Iraqi progress against those standards.”<sup>54</sup>

### Recommendations

The Department of Defense should add Security Force Assistance (SFA) as a core function for each of the Military Departments with the Army specified as lead Service. The Army should embrace security force assistance as a core function and assume the role as Lead Service and Executive Agent in this endeavor. USSOCOM should not have to shoulder the SFA effort. USSOCOM should retain its traditional FID mission as a core mission and key strategic subcomponent to SFA operations. Low-visibility footprints, specialized expertise, and organizing, training, equipping, and advising partner nation special operating forces either in conjunction with a larger GPF SFA mission or by itself can only be accomplished by SOF.

The Army should continue institutionalizing SFA across the entire force in all aspects of the DOTMLPF functions. At present, institutionalization of SFA is occurring but only marginally. Institutionalization of SFA needs to be elevated in priority throughout all military education outlets.

The Army should strongly consider commissioning and fully resourcing an enduring Security Force Assistance Command that organizes, trains, equips and provides scalable general purpose force advisors. This command should also be capable of providing a tactical to strategic operations linkage function between the basic

tactical army formations (BCTs) and multiple joint, interagency, external agency, multi-national and other actors who are critical to the whole of government approach to complex operations associated with irregular warfare. Sufficient consideration by DoD should be given to commission a joint command with the Army designated as the lead Service and Executive agent.

The Army must continue to develop capable ground forces and future combat systems that can operate anywhere, and maintain dominance along the full spectrum of operations and retain the high-end competitive advantage. A Security Force Assistance Command would go a long way towards balancing strategic risk by providing capabilities and capacity that has thus far been marginalized and put on the shoulders of BCTs. A permanent but scalable SFA capability would allow BCTs and all general purpose forces to focus on honing their wartime fighting skills so they can operate anywhere along the spectrum of conflict without diffusing their high-end combat proficiency as has been the case to date.

DoD, with the Army as the lead Service, should create, resource and operate a joint, interagency, external agency and multi-national training center modeled after the highly successful Combat Training Centers. A training center is required to operationalize the entire DoD effort from a new balanced defense strategy to updated department policy to emerging Service, joint, and interagency doctrine, best practices and TTP on a whole host of complex issues that have been lumped together under the moniker of Irregular Warfare. Training at this center must focus on addressing current capacity building gaps that exist between tactical units (GPF and SOF) and advisors (GPF and SOF) on the ground and joint, interagency, external agency, and multi-

national partners before they deploy. Government agencies must build the capacity to launch and sustain a concerted effort in order to respond with known and anticipated threats to national interests and validate the whole of government approach.

### Areas for Further Research

The following list of issues and areas deserve further consideration in this debate and are not all-inclusive. Specific command and control and other working relationships between advisor teams, conventional forces, interagency partners and multi-national participants have been a challenge in Afghanistan and Iraq and need to be resolved. A detailed study on how to develop a flexible and adaptable general purpose force advisor organization, including manpower and equipment requirements, for a scalable advisor command is needed. These requirements must factor into an acceptable overall end strength that meets capability and capacity requirements of the new defense strategy.

Costs associated with creating and sustaining a full time Security Force Assistance Command deserves further analysis. DoD should fully develop an operating concept and location for a new Joint Interagency Training Center that would maximize joint and interagency, external agency and multi-national participation from the tactical to the strategic level of engagement. Finally, past “quiet victories” in South America, Malaysia, and the Philippines should be studied in detail so that lessons are appropriately applied to future operations.

### Conclusion

Ultimately, this boils down to balancing priorities, current and future. The Army can play a major role in the Department of Defense’s effort to balance strategic risk by

institutionalizing security force operations. Michele Flournoy and Shawn Brimley of the Center for a New American Security proscribe a suitable framework for framing strategic risk choices into three dimensions: how to allocate risk among the current strategic priorities, how to allocate risk when investing in capabilities for the future, and how to balance current and future priorities.<sup>55</sup> Institutionalizing security force assistance potentially buys down risk in the near term by providing the United States with a capability and capacity that is sorely needed now. It buys down future risk by providing a capability and capacity that has been routinely required throughout our Nation's history and will be required for the foreseeable future by all strategic estimates. Finally, it balances risk through current and future priorities by providing a capability and capacity that is necessary along the full spectrum of operations from pre-conflict engagement to post-conflict operations and frees our major combat forces up to prepare for full spectrum operations. It is time for the Army to institutionalize security force assistance operations.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, "The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference," (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002), 9, 12. Malcolm Gladwell tells us that the name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the Tipping Point. He also describes the Tipping Point as the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point.

<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Gates, "A Balanced Strategy, Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 1 (January-February 2009), 28-33.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard I. Finel, "A security strategy we can afford", *Armed Forces Journal*, March 2009 (Springfield, VA: Army Times Publishing Co. 2009), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard I. Finel, "A security strategy we can afford", *Armed Forces Journal*, March 2009 (Springfield, VA: Army Times Publishing Co. 2009), 21, 37.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Army Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), Glossary-9.

<sup>6</sup> Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, April 12, 2001 (As amended October 17, 2008), accessed online at [www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new-pubs/jp1-02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new-pubs/jp1-02.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> For an overview on the whole of government approach see FM 3.07, *Stability Operations*, Chapter 1, page 1-4 and Appendix B.

<sup>8</sup> Michael P. Noonan, “*Next-War-itis, This-War-it is, and the American Military*,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, January 2009, accessed at [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org) , For the Army, Noonan describes the three camps as follows: The current “traditionalists” were largely enculturated through the experiences of the late Cold War or Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm. For them the Army is the sword and shield of the Republic and needs to focus on large-scale ground combat against similar foes. The “transitionalists” are those officers who came of age during the peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations of the 1990s. These officers seem to see some utility in political-military approaches to the strategic environment, but still seem most comfortable with an approach heavily favoring the application of conventional military power. Last, the “modernists” are the officers who have come of age in the post-9/11 era. Mostly junior officers, they have been shaped by the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan to buy into the concept of people-oriented counterinsurgency and working with, and sometimes by and through, local forces on the ground. (Each of these age groups and cohorts described above roughly track across the services.)

<sup>9</sup> Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report*, January 2009, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report*, January 2009, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report*, January 2009, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report*, January 2009, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report*, January 2009, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Defense Directive 3000.05, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations*, November 28, 2005, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*, December 1, 2008, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Joe Fox and MAJ Dana Stowell, “Professional Army Advisors – A Way Ahead,” *Infantry Bugler* Winter 2007 (Alpharetta, GA: SouthComm Publishing Co, Inc, 2007), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Major Michael Jason, “Integrating the Advisory Effort in the Army: A Full Spectrum Solution,” *Military Review*, Sep-Oct 08, 27.

<sup>18</sup> General George Casey, Jr., “An interview with George W. Casey, Jr.,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Defense, 2008 National Defense Strategy, June 2008, 9.



- <sup>20</sup> Department of Defense, 2008 National Defense Strategy, June 2008, 15.
- <sup>21</sup> General George Casey, Jr., "An interview with George W. Casey, Jr.," *Joint Force Quarterly* 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, pp. 17.
- <sup>22</sup> General George Casey, Jr., "An interview with George W. Casey, Jr.," *Joint Force Quarterly* 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, 18.
- <sup>23</sup> Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare (IW)*, December 1, 2008, 2.
- <sup>24</sup> General George Casey, Jr., "An interview with George W. Casey, Jr.," *Joint Force Quarterly* 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, 18.
- <sup>25</sup> Major Michael Jason, "Integrating the Advisory Effort in the Army: A Full Spectrum Solution," *Military Review*, Sep-Oct 08, 27,29.
- <sup>26</sup> Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance, *Commander's Handbook for Security Force Assistance* (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2008), 2.
- <sup>27</sup> Given the institutional Army's resistance to organizing a capability specifically suited for SFA operations, it will be interesting to see whether the emerging doctrine will drive the Army towards a force structure change, or if the doctrine will conform to current organizational structure, which relies on an ad hoc approach to SFA.
- <sup>28</sup> John Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for an Army Advisor Command," *Military Review*, September-October 2008, 22.
- <sup>29</sup> General James T. Conway, "The Long War, Send in the Marines, A Marine Corps Operational Employment Concept to Meet an Uncertain Security Environment", (Washington, D.C.: United States Marine Corps, 2008), 15,16.
- <sup>30</sup> General James T. Conway, "The Long War, Send in the Marines, A Marine Corps Operational Employment Concept to Meet an Uncertain Security Environment", (Washington, D.C.: United States Marine Corps, 2008), 24.
- <sup>31</sup> John A. Nagl, "Let's Win the Wars We're In," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2009), 25.
- <sup>32</sup> John Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for an Army Advisor Command," *Military Review*, September-October 2008, 26.
- <sup>33</sup> John Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for an Army Advisor Command," *Military Review*, September-October 2008, 21.
- <sup>34</sup> MAJ Michael Jason, "Integrating the Advisory Effort in the Army: A Full Spectrum Solution," *Military Review*, Sep-Oct 08, 29.
- <sup>35</sup> John A. Nagl, "Let's Win the Wars We're In," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>36</sup> John Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for an Army Advisor Command," *Military Review*, September-October 2008, 21.

<sup>37</sup> John Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for an Army Advisor Command," *Military Review*, September-October 2008, 24-25.

<sup>38</sup> MAJ Michael Jason, "Integrating the Advisory Effort in the Army: A Full Spectrum Solution," *Military Review*, Sep-Oct 08, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Raymond Mattox, "Inventing the Vanguard: Developing and Sustaining a Professional Combat Advisor Corps", <https://forums.bcks.army.mil/secure/CommunityBrowser.aspx?id=74690&lang=en-us>, (posted January, 24, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Colonel (Retired) Gregory Fontenot and COL (Ret) Kevin Benson, "Transformation or Reclamation? Organizing to Win the War We Have and Those We May Have Yet to Fight," *Army Magazine*, March 2009, (Arlington, VA: Association of the United States Army, 2009), 44.

<sup>41</sup> John A. Nagl, "Let's Win the Wars We're In," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2009), 23.

<sup>42</sup> Bernard I. Finel, "A security strategy we can afford", *Armed Forces Journal*, March 2009 (Springfield, VA: Army Times Publishing Co. 2009), 20.

<sup>43</sup> Colonel Gian P. Gentile, "Let's Build an Army to Win All Wars," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2009), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Colonel Gian P. Gentile, "Let's Build an Army to Win All Wars," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2009), 28.

<sup>45</sup> General George Casey, Jr., "An interview with George W. Casey, Jr.," *Joint Force Quarterly* 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Author's personal observations while serving as Chief of Training Assessment and Validation in Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan from July 2007-08.

<sup>47</sup> Colonel Gian P. Gentile, "Let's Build an Army to Win All Wars," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2009), 31.

<sup>48</sup> The author served as the senior light task force observer/controller at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA from 2005-2007 and trained 19 battalion task forces for deployment to Iraq.

<sup>49</sup> John Nagl, "Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for an Army Advisor Command," *Military Review*, September-October 2008, 24.

<sup>50</sup> Colonel Gian P. Gentile, "Let's Build an Army to Win All Wars," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 52, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2009, (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2009), 31.

<sup>51</sup> Department of Defense, 2008 National Defense Strategy, June 2008, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Michele A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, "The Defense Inheritance: Challenges and Choices for the Next Pentagon Team," *The Washington Quarterly* (2008),31:4, 71.

<sup>53</sup> Joe Fox and MAJ Dana Stowell, "Professional Army Advisors – A Way Ahead," *Infantry Bugler* Winter 2007 (Alpharetta, GA: SouthComm Publishing Co, Inc, 2007), 11.

<sup>54</sup> Colonel (Retired) David Jesmer, Jr., "Credit where it's due: U.S. standards, not Iraqi performance, may be the problem," *Armed Forces Journal*, July 2008 (Springfield, VA: Army Times Publishing Co. 2008), 36.

<sup>55</sup> Michele A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, "The Defense Inheritance: Challenges and Choices for the Next Pentagon Team," *The Washington Quarterly* (2008),31:4, 63.

